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ABSTRACT

Rural Economics: Farmers in Transition (RE:FIT), the Dislocated Farmer Assistance Program in Ohio, was designed to help farm families assess their skills and interests in nonfarm employment. The processes used by agents in counseling families were evaluated. The program was designed by personnel of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) to offer direct assistance to farm families through the services of trained agents. OCES agents developed materials to facilitate: (1) accepting the situation; (2) understanding transferrable skills; (3) realizing interests comparable to farming; and (4) exploring career and job options. Agents received intensive training in data collection, counseling families, and referral. Instruments to gather baseline data, to record interviews, and to make pre-post test comparisons were developed by OCES personnel. Two of those instruments, a preliminary discussion form and a log sheet, are included as appendices to the report. Assessment of preliminary data from 28 farm families shows that self-assessment and counseling had an impact on farm families, and that there is a need for further training of agents. (MDE)

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RURAL ECONOMICS: FARMERS IN TRANSITION

Preliminary Assessment of Dislocated Farmer Assistance Program

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RURAL ECONOMICS: FARMERS IN TRANSITION

Preliminary Assessment of Dislocated Farmer Assistance Program

BACKGROUND

The "rural crisis" that has been focused primarily in the plains' states is beginning to affect Ohio's rural communities. Estimates are that 15%, or 200,000 of the U.S. farmers and ranchers are in severe financial difficulty and that the impact of this is most severe for middle-sized farm operations-- not the small, more "inefficient" family farm of folklore (National Governors' Association. 1986. Lovan. 1985). In Ohio, it is estimated that between 2,000 and 5,000 farmers will leave farming during each of the next five years (Henderson. 1986).

This financial stress comes after one of the most prosperous times in American agriculture (Avery. 1985). Because of improvements in production, less than 4% of the American populations produced enough food to feed the world and farming appeared to be a lucrative and profitable occupation. Inflation and demand increased farm prices, foreign markets expanded and shortages were a problem (Wakefield. 1986). Then, in the early 1980's many forces came into play-- the dollar strengthened slowing export demand, real interest rates surged and land markets declined (Forster. 1986). Farmers who had experienced the greatest growth and expansion in the 1970's and early 1980's suffered the most as their growth was a function of inflated dollars and interest rates to purchase land that is now valued at far less than the initial purchase price.

The Cooperative Extension Service (CES) was instrumental in aiding farmers in getting to the successful production and financial return levels of the mid

to late 1970's. Farm families have historic ties to the CES and have trust in the institution. In this crisis period, the question arises as how to best use the credibility and accessability of the CES to aid the families in financial stress.

SITUATION

The Ohio Cooperative Extension Service is approaching the farm crisis from two very different but compatable angles. The first is financial management programs, production efficiency improvement efforts, and other programs designed to aid farm families remain in the industry. The second approach, which is the focus of this paper, is a program designed to help farm families identify all options available to them while counseling them to neither stay in nor exit from farming.

This second approach has been named RE:FIT, an acronym for Rural Economics: Farmers in Transition. RE:FIT allows the OCES to work as the "firm" in basic outplacement services such as counseling, career options and referral assistance. The program utilizes the historic credibility farm families have in the CES to provide the families with reassessment of their own marketable and salable skills and interests. The program approach and materials are the result of decisions based on comments from many states' leaders in agriculture and the apparent absence of materials designed specifically for this audience.

The structure of RE:FIT is in three distinct but interrelated parts. The first is a program to help farm families identify qualitative indicators for change in earlier stages of the crisis. The goal of this program is to give farm families more time for making changes and decisions on farming, alternative careers, training and education, and supplemental income. This program

is being developed and the pilot is to be implemented near the end of 1986.

The second component of RE:FIT is called **From Farming To...** and addresses the potential in the farm families for nonfarm employment. It is this phase of the program with which this paper is concerned.

The process and the materials developed for this program are inseparable. The process is a mixture of crisis counseling, career planning, self-assessment and referral. The materials were developed as "steps" in the process for facilitating: 1) acceptance of the situation; 2) understanding transferrable skills from farming to other occupations; 3) realizing comparable interests between farming and other occupations; and 4) exploring career/job options.

Participants in the program are self-selected; they identify themselves to the county Extension agent, agriculture. Participants can be individuals but more often are farm couples and, if the situation warrents, the older youth in the family. The process begins with a 10 item attitudinal questionnaire for use in evaluation. Following this, a "Preliminary Discussion" (PD) is used to do three things: 1) collect demographic and knowledge baseline data; 2) provide the agent (implementor) with information necessary to know what components of the program will be useful; and 3) introduce items to be discussed to the farm family members participating.

The first "component" instrument is a transferrable skills inventory. The tasks were identified by data based on the results of an approach to occupational analysis entitled DACUM (Developing A CurriculUM) conducted by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education at The Ohio State University for OCES. These tasks were then compared to occupational clusters identified by the U.S. Office of Education with relevant tasks listed in a transferrable skills inventory under clusters utilizing comparable skills. The

instrument is a "user friendly" three choice questionnaire which for each of nine tasks under 10 clusters asks if the participants "Do and like to do" the task, perform the task but "Do not like to do it", and "Don't Do" the task. After completion of the instrument, the agent discusses answers section by section identifying at this point what each cluster represents.

The same data were used to develop a simple interest inventory in which the participants must choose from 5 or 6 tasks, situations, or environments what task they would most prefer to perform assuming that they can do all tasks listed. This inventory is then used to demonstrate to the participants that many of the conditions and requirements they enjoy in farming can be found in other occupations and jobs.

Third, the agent can offer the participants one of three existing job search programs that match the interests and abilities of the farm family members with occupations[1]. Following the use of these three instruments, which can be used separately at more than one session, the agent is able to discuss with the family members what options exist. The alternatives are grouped in four sections: 1) Community Services; 2) Training/Retraining; 3) Job Skills & Placement and 4) Alternative Farm Enterprises.

Community Services includes counseling services, sustainence programs, and local support programs. Training and retraining programs are closely aligned with joint vocational schools, the Ohio Job Training Partnership Program, community colleges, and technical institutions. Job Skills and Placement is referrals to organizations which have jobs clubs and programs and organizations

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[1]. Additional funding is being sought to develop one instrument that is not deductive in potential occupations identified by the instrument. The construct for this instrument is to demonstrate the wide range of occupations/jobs available to the farm family utilizing skills or interests, or both.

that specialize in assisting dislocated persons secure employment as well as the more traditional job search skills assistance. Alternative Farm Enterprises include the agricultural programs of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service.

Throughout the development of the program, the program decision makers were cognizant of the "crisis response" behaviors common to this type of program. Wanting to overcome the typical knee-jerk reaction, from the inception the question has been asked "how will we know if this program is successful". The evaluation methodology proposed is designed to answer this ultimate question.

EVALUATION FOR RE:FIT

The evaluation for the **From Farming To...** component of RE:FIT is divided into three distinct phases: I. Baseline Data Phase; II. Implementation Data Phase; and III. Summative Impact Data Phase. Each phase will utilize various data collection techniques described in the following summary.

Phases of the Evaluation

I. The initial data-gathering phase will provide baseline data for descriptive purposes and for comparisons of before and after treatement results. Data will be colleced by individual county Extension agents using two instruments. The first is a ten item questionnaire to measure attidude. The second is a Prelimary Discussion Form (PD) which measures attitude, perceptions of skills, and demographic information (appendix A). A copy of the PD is to be sent to the coordinator of the program evaluation. The information from each PD will be added to a data bank for analysis and tabulation of baseline data.

In addition to the PD, the Extension agent will establish a file for each

farm family which will contain the PD and a "diary" of contacts and results labled simply "Log" (appendix B). Each time a member of the farm family contacts the agent, the topic and results of the contact will be recorded. Upon completion of the program (the time at which the farm famly chooses to discontinue contact with the agent- e.g. applies for jobs, sells the farm, obtains new jobs, continues farm operation as sole income), the entire file will be forwarded to the coordinator of the program evaluation for analysis.

The baseline data phase will continue throughout the program. Preliminary data will be reported September 1986 and quarterly reports will be made.

II. The implementation data phase will begin shortly after the initial training program for the Extension agents and will continue throughout the program. This phase will essentially serve as a monitoring mechanism to detect malfunctinos in the porcess and tools used by the organization.

There will be one main method of data collection used (Focus Group technique) with additional information techniques to be implemented as needed e.g. interviews. The Focus Group technique will be used with Extension agents conducting the RE:FIT program to address issues of training, perceptions of ease of implementation, record-keeping, general reactions of the agents and perceived general reactions of the clients (appendix C).

Results will be summarized and used throughout the implementation of the program. Changes in forms and the process can be facilitated through the use of the information provided by these interviews. Focus groups will be conducted by members of the program evaluation study group.

III. The summative impact data phase will utilize baseline data as a reference for pre/post comparisons and will include a final collection of data from individuals after they complete the program. The process used in this

final phase will be two-fold.

Information to be summarized will be analyzed and summarized quarterly. Interim reports will provide quarterly data on: I. Baseline information; II. Implementation of the program; and III. Impact of the program. Interviews will begin approximately one to two months after the first clients have left/completed the program. Information obtained from interviews will be provided in the final report of the program evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

What follows is a discussion on the design, population, data collection plan, instrumentation, and data analysis of the RE:FIT program.

Design

The design of the evaluation is a One-group Pretest-Posttest (Campbell and Stanley, 1963) with some follow-up measurement within the population suggesting a modified Time-series design. Realizing the limitations of the one-group designs, but also considering the impact of the actual program on the population the study group chose this design as the most effective method for measuring the results and minimizing the measurement effects on the population.

Results can only be generalized to the participants of the program (not a problem when evaluation is meant for a particular program's improvement and impact). Internal validity threats are a major concern in this design and were dealt with by measuring participants' perceptions of effects of the program. For example, participants were directed to give perceptions of not only behavior change <u>but</u> why it changed (participation in the program). Caution

should be taken when interpreting results to include possible additional explanations for documented change.

Population

There are three populations to be examined in the evaluation. The population for phases I and III of the evaluation consists of members of all farm families who participate in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service RE:FIT program. The units of analysis are individual family members. The time frame for this program evaluation is between May 1, 1986 and May 1, 1987; thus, members of all farm families participating in RE:FIT during this time period will be considered to be part of the population. In addition, Extension personnel and support organization personnel involved with RE:FIT will be considered to be two other populations for phases II and III of the evaluation.

Phase I will use census data, as will part of the phase III data collection plan- the mail survey. Phase II and the interview portion of phase III will use samples. The phase II sample will be a purposeful sample of Extension personnel who have participated in the planning and delivery of the program. The interviewing sample for phase III will be a purposeful sample of members of farm families who participated in the program and personnel of selected support organizations who have worked with RE:FIT clients. Frames for the three populations will be obtained from the main coordinator of the RE:FIT program.

Data Collection Plan

Phase I. Data will be collected by Extension peronnel throughout the duration of the year using the Preliminary Discussion Form (PD) which utilizes a personal interview with each client or family unit. Each agent collecting the data will have been trained on the use of the PD. Additional demographic information will be obtained using records kept by each agent.

Phase II. Data will be collected using the Focus Group Interview technique conducted by trained evaluators not involved with the RE:FIT program. Questions were developed by a panel of experts on instrumentation and the RE:FIT program. Focus Groups will be conducted with Extension personnel at three different times during the year: August, 1986; October 1986; and Arpil 1987.

Phase III. Data will be collected using a mail survey to be sent to members of each farm family immediately after completion of the program. A follow-up plan, a modification of the version recommended by Dillman (1978) will be implemented to help with non-response bias.

This procedure will continue throughout the year. Additional data will be collected by inteviews conducted by trained interviewers approximately one to two months post completion of the program. Interviews will continue through the end of the time frame. Interviews with personnel of selected support organizations will also be conducted by trained evaluators and will occur throughout the time frame indicated above.

Instrumentation

Phase I. The Preliminary Discussion Form was developed by a member of the RE:FIT staff (Heimlich, 1986) and was validated using a panel of experts. The test-retest method was selected to determine reliability. The instrument was field-tested using selected Extension personnel and final revisions were made in April 1986. The attitude measurement which accompanies the PD is a modified checklist using Yes/No format. Demographic data and information on skills are obtained through the use of the PD as an interview schedule. The diary for the client file was developed using as a model the diary used with the CES FARM program (Miskell, 1985). Both instruments were judged to be content and face

valid. Reliability is being tested using a test-retest method with pilot counties.

Phase II. The interview schedule for the Focus Group was developed and tested for validity (Archer, 1986) using a panel of experts. Revisions on the questions were made following the preliminary use (Archer and Layman, 1986).

Phase III. Instrument one is a mail survey developed and tested for reliability and validity (Van Tilburg, 1986). Many of the same questions on this instrument are found on the PD as well, providing the opportunity for a pre/post comparision. The measure of internal consistency for the attitude scale is the Cronbach's alpha.

Instrument two is an interview schedule to be used with selected members of farm families who completed the program. Questions are qualitative in nature which provides for indepth study of particular clients and particular results. The questions were developed and validated (Van Tilburg, 1986) and were field-tested using a panel of experts.

Instrument three is an interview schedule to be used with personnel of selected support organizations. Again, this interview schedule was developed and validated (Van Tilburg, 1986) using a panel of experts. The intent of this instrument is to gather additional data not provided by clients nor Extension personnel. Data from this method will be analyzed and used as additional evidence of impact.

The response format for both types of interviews will be open-ended in nature but will be pre-coded, a procedure recommended by Sudman and Bradburn (1985). This procedure provides the interviewer and respondent the opportunity to code the qualitative data as they are being collected.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical packages available through The Ohio State University. Qualitative data colled through the Focus Group and individual interviews will be coded using the WordPerfect word-processing software package.

Descriptive statistics will provide the baseline data and will be used to describe the results of the program. T-tests and ANOVA will be used to compare groups and detect pre/post differences in scores.

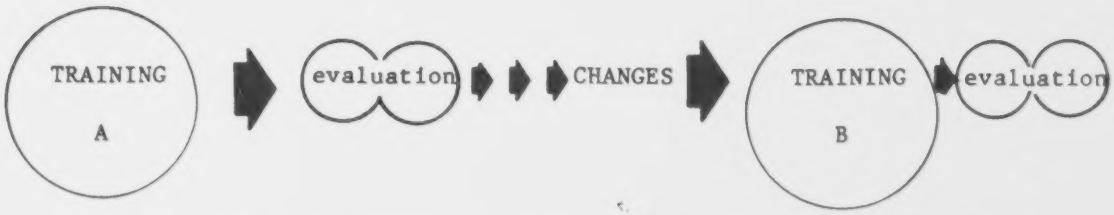
The process of coding qualitative information will include expert examination of information to determine common themes. The pre-coding technique permits the respondent to code the open-ended response into a selected set of pre-determined response categories which can then be analyzed like quantitative data.

Preliminary Results and Implications

Evaluation of Training of Agents

The population measured consisted of the OCES agents who participated in the pilot phase of the RE:FIT program. Anticipating difficulties in the training process, one District (OCES has five districts) was identified for a preliminary training approach. Following implementation of training, a focus group was held to identify training process changes. A second district was then identified for implementing training with the changes indicated from the focus group and a focus group interview was held with this second group of agents to examine benefits/costs in the changed approach. A schematic diagram

of the implementation design is represented below.



This model was used because the effectiveness of the training was deemed a significant variable in the successful implementation of the RE:FIT program. The initial training was developed by the program developers and implemented based on what they perceived as training needs. A discussion of the process and results of the evaluation measures follows.

TRAINING A

- one-on-one training between the District Specialist, CNRD and the county Extension agent, Agriculture
- utilization of role play with the agent acting as a farmer
- "working through" the process of the RE:FIT session
- answering questions the agent may have on the materials and process

Results of Focus Group Interview with Agents Involved in Training A

The evaluation instrument can be found in appendix C. The information that follows is the actual report from the evaluation team to the project personnel.

" The Focus Group was a new experience for all members of the Evaluation team of the RE:FIT program. Logistically, this Focus Group went well.

Facilities and equipment were adequate, there was communication with Administration, and the Evaluation Team was well prepared. However, agents stated after the interview that they did have problems with being audio-taped. They stated that they were not completely candid because they were unsure of the future use of the tape. Another limiting factor to their candor was stated to be the presence of the trainer of the Agents in RE:FIT during the initial part of the group interview.

" Only five of the eight participating agents were present, which may have influenced the results. Following the Focus Group, a discussion was held with these same agents about the Focus Group Process, where it can be used, and the benefits that can result.

"RE:FIT - Overall Viewpoints

" All of the Agents involved with the Focus Group agreed that the time was right and the idea appropriate for RE:FIT. This was emphasized with statements such as, 'We Need It' and 'Go for it'. They felt that a great benefit of RE:FIT was that it is more than a process to just find a job, but it attempts to find the 'best' job. Agents had developed an attitude that this program would be beneficial for farmers who need to make the transition from full-time farming.

" They did express concern that the timing of the RE:FIT during this year was like 'planting corn in December'. Agents also expressed a concern that the RE:FIT program was not complete in that efforts whould be made to actually place farmers in new jobs, and that Agents should have a prominent role in this placement. Other concerns were that RE:FIT appears to be in competition with programs from other agencies and that the media blitz for the RE:FIT program was premature.

"RE:FIT - Strengths of Training (FGI)

" The manual was good.

Both the manual and the procedures for taking clientele through the process was organized well.

During the time elapsed since the initiation of RE:FIT and this interview, Agents had developed ideas on alternative uses of the materials, e.g. with existing Young Farmer groups.

The $300 to pilot counties helped county budgets, but only to a small degree. This amount is only token, and not a major factor in contributing to the Agent attitude toward RE:FIT.

Agents emphasized that they could use, 'all of the individual training that we can get'.

"RE:FIT - Weaknesses of Agent Training

" All agents agreed that a 'walk through' with a case study, possibly in a group setting, would have improved their abilities in working with the RE:FIT materials.

RE:FIT is 'not a program to attract a lot of bodies'. Therefore, agents felt that an improvement of the training would have been to incorporate a marketing strategy on how to reach more people appropriate for the program.

Most agents in the interview felt that the end product of their involvement should be the actual placement of clientele. If this is not the situation, then efforts in the training should be directed at better defining Agent activities.

Agents were unsure of the necessity of utilizing the forms and procedures in the given format. That is, some felt that their own experience and

familiarity with clients might tempt them to shortcut the procedures, yet develop the same conclusions and/or recommendations.

Timing of Agent training in relation to when potential clients might be using the program was poor."

Use of the Evaluation Findings

Given the results of the focus group interview, the program staff made changes in the implementation of the second training program. The single most significant change was moving from a one-on-one approach to a group setting utilizing the agents participating in role playing and role reversal strategies. The second training then followed this structure:

TRAINING B

- Group setting
- Role Playing through the program materials
- Emphasis on interagency cooperation at the state level
- Emphasis on the role of OCES in aiding farm families to the appropriate agency/organization for job skills and placement assistance
- Team teaching utilizing the District Specialist, CNRD and a State Specialist, CNRD to address issues of interagency actions and cooperation.
- Use of a field person who has successfully used the materials with over 70 farm family members
- Use of "testimony" of the trainers in personal implementation experiences of the program materials

A second focus group interview was conducted with these agents with the same evaluation team. The results follow.

Results of Focus Group Interview with Agents

Involved in Training B

The instrument used for this focus group interview was identical to that for the first focus group. The Agents involved were from the Southwest district of Ohio. The focus group interview occured the afternoon of the day of the training program. What follows is from the report presented by Layman and Archer, the evaluation team members.

"RE:FIT - Overall Viewpoints

Overall the Agents participating in this FGI stated that the RE:FIT concept was right. Quotes used to describe their overall perceptions of the program included:

'Great opportunity, innovative, and forward looking.

'Improved Employment

'Needed.

'An area that we can forge ahead with new programs that gets back to what Extension started to do, to help farm families.

'No, I do not think that it will be something that sits on the shelf, and it will work very well with the Accelerated Farm Financial Program, it will be a nice continuation of that, and a logical one.'

"RE:FIT - Weaknesses

Much concern was related about the overall direction of the RE:FIT program. When asked the unstructured question, 'anybody have any further impressions about the program in general?' Reactions to this were:

'I think it's too loose.

'I think it is a compilation of a bunch of different types of methods and techniques with no sound guidance or plans in order to put the program together and make it a go.

'It lacks a hellava lot of direction, to put it quite bluntly.

'I think it has some good methods that were discussed (in the training), but it lacks structure and coordination of how to use those and what to do with them.

'We have a big framework here that we can hang things on, but we don't know where to hang it. The idea is good, it is something that is needed, but (we) really do not have any training or guidelines of how to get across this chasm, really.'

"RE:FIT Training - Weaknesses

The question was asked "Since we are here really about your training, and we have gotten into the weaknesses of that training, let's continue on that line, things that you would like to have seen done differently:

'...what we got handed out, there is little or no guidelines how to use what we were handed. I mean a lot of it was talked about, but there is nothing in print.

'Started on time.

'Another comment was made that it did not necessarily need broad based publicity, and I remember seeing it several times in the Ohio Farmer and Buckeye Farm News. What the heck is broad based publicity? That is a braod based as you can get.

'Jeff, we could not have done a good job handed that (referring to the RE:FIT notebook) and given time to prepare to present those materials and train

everybody on the program, because the philosophy of the program has not been thought out, the direction the program is supposed to go has not been though out, there is no, at the moment, the objectives have not been thought out...it was so loose, that it was just a matter of us sitting at the desk and administering a couple of inventories things. Maybe with these materials I can talk to a person and get them thinking about feeling better about themeselves, and that is about it...

'We had some agents that had some real problems with the instruments as far as making any sense out of them.

'There were not good directions on the instruments and how to use them.

'I understand that from conception to the time the child is born it takes nine months. I think, right now, that this program is only with a three month fetus. We've got a long ways to go before we have a program that we can say that we have a program. It is nothing more, from what I learned today, than an acronym that was used to develop some instruments.'

"RE:FIT Training - Strengths

"The following question led to the next series of quotations: 'What do you see as strong points from this training...what strong points came out?

'I still think it is a positive program. I think that the instruments, if they are used properly, whether or not we know how to use them properly, can be a positive influence on a person's self respect.

'I think that we ought to give Joe Heimlich some credit for developing some really sound instruments.

'On a scale of one to ten, I think this is a ten in terms of timeliness.

'Give them credit for putting something together.

'My feelings are essentially the same. I think that the program has a lot

of potential, it is very timely and needed, the instruments appear to be very usable, it just needs a lot of coordination to bring everything together and offer solid direction as to both using the instruments and working with the couples that are involved.

'This (training) would have been a total disaster individually. The key questions...were asked by various members who were here in this group meeting, and we would have missed all of that in individual training.'

"Recommendations:

1. Punctuality in terms of starting and stopping times.
2. Pages numbered in notebook, with table of contents.
3. Handouts that are discussed during the training should be either distributed during the training, or included with notebook materials.
4. Clarity on distribution of Extension RE:FIT funds should be made prior to the Agent training.
5. Develop more complete directions to instruct (remind) agents how to use the instrument.
6. Amount of time alloted (2 1/2 hours) should be suffiecient for adequate group training.
7. A group training is preferential.
8. Group training should be more formalized."

The evaluation team made note that, as this is the second of three focus group interviews, the findings, interpretations, judgements and recommendations will be complied following the last focus group.

Use of the Evaluation Findings

Within forty-eight hours of the training, the program developers had hard copy of the evaluation findings. Within one week of the report, several changes in the notebook/materials for the agents were complete and were sent via a weekly mailing to the counties from State operations.

The changes were primarily in presentation; after close scrutiny of comments, it appeared to the program personnel that the perceived problems and weaknesses centered primarily around two issues: that of goals and directions and that of facility of use of the program. To address goals and direction for the program, the goals were more explicitly stated in a revised introduction to the notebook; and in appropriate places throughout the notebook, the intended purpose of each step was highlighted with how it helps achieve the desired end. The difference in approach between RE:FIT and other more traditional Extension programs was highlighted in how far our role extends in the process with the participant.

The instructions as they were presented in the trainings were put into a narrative outline form and included in the appropriate sections of the notebook. The notebook pages were numbered by section (i.e. I-1...II-1...etc) to allow for any additions or changes in any one section in the future without forcing renumbering of the entire notebook. A Table of Contents was added and pages were color coded to speed "flipping to the right page".

Preliminary Data from the Preliminary Discussion

Although the RE:FIT program has been used with over 70 individuals through this stage of the pilot phase, the following data are based on a sample of 28 participants. The decrease in the sample is a function of the time lag between implementation and receipt of the data collection instruments in the CNRD

offices.

The average age of the participants is 39.7 years although individual ages range from 19 (a working child) to 71 years of age. Fifty-two percent of the participants are male. In all cases, the male is the predominant farm operator; farm operations included in this preliminary data are dairy, grain, livestock, and general farm enterprises with the average tenure on the farm of 24.2 years.

A simple majority of the responding units (families are given the weight of one rather than by number of participants in the program), 54.5% of the respondents classified themselves as experiencing sever financial difficulties with 100% believing additional nonfarm income would help them immediately. Even with projected combined nonfarm incomes, however, 87.5% believe that income would be insufficient to sustain the family <u>if they remain in farming</u>. Of the respondents, 25% believe that current nonfarm income could sustain the family <u>even if there were no farm debt</u>. No family members considered their financial situation to be any better than "not good: will get by but it will be tough" with 27.3% respondents at that level, 45.4% consider their situation "bad: cannot afford the extras you used to have" and 27.3% "desperate: cannot afford basic items now".

All respondents believe that the farm crisis is affecting their daily living patterns. Over 4/5 of the family members believe that the farm stress is the cause for other problems in their personal lives. All the families feel they have open communication within the family unit; 72.7% have family friends with whom they openly discuss both the family financial and emotional situations. It is interesting to note that 90% have not spoken with their clergy about problems they are having.

At the beginning of the session, the majority of the participants felt they had "a lot of skills" or "some skills" that would be marketable. Yet, no individual was able to name specific skills; a few were able to list employment areas or occupational clusters. One-fifth of the respondents felt they could do anything "with the skills (you) have from farming" but 80% felt they could name employers locally who might need their work skills. Although half the participants had prepared resumes, only 8.3% had ever prepared a fuctional resume (focusing on skills and life experiences not just work history and educational background). Nearly two-thirds of the respondents stated they would not know what to expect in or how to prepare for a job interview.

To this point in the interview, the responses were given by the participants as direct answers to questions prior to the implementation of the RE:FIT program. The data following are rankings assigned by the implementors to the families regarding observations and evaluations of knowledge prior and subsequent to the treatment (RE:FIT). The instrument utilizes a five-point scale with a five (5) ranking being given to strongly agree to a one (1) for strongly disagree. Three (3) receives a neutral.

Prior to treatment, 18.2% of the respondents were perceived as being aware of their skills transferrable from farming to other occupations with the mean score at 2.64. Following the RE:FIT program, 100% strongly agreed or agreed that the participants were aware of their transferrable skills (mean 4.09). Similarly, 27.3% were aware of interests that could be applied to job search prior to the program and 100% were aware of such interests post-treatment (m=3.91)

Even though over half the families considered themselves in a crisis situation, only 18.2% of the participants had given serious consideration to

nonfarm income as a means of surviving or "getting through" the farm financial crisis. Conversly, 18.2% of the family members felt they were not in a position to seriously consider nonfarm employment opportunities post-program with a m of 1.91.

The implementors' perceptions of the materials and process was also measured on the same five-point scale. The program structure was given a mean score of 4.09 with 90.9% of the respondents agreeing that the structure is effective in working through the process with the family. The question addressing the effectiveness of the materials in letting the clients learn about transferrable skills also rated a mean of 4.09 with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing. The only score higher was regarding the clients learning of interests through the materials. The mean score was 4.18 with 18.2% of the responses strongly agreeing and the remainder agreeing.

Few of the RE:FIT sessions ended with the referral portion of the program. Most of the P.D.'s indicated that follow-up sessions would be held in which referral would occur. Those that utilized the last three sections of the RE:FIT notebook rated the program slightly lower than the previous section evaluated: the job information section was given a mean score of 3.6, and the referral information a 3.5 with 50% agreeing that the handbook is easy to use for referral information and 50% neutral.

Implications

Results of this initial evaluation of the implementation of RE:FIT clearly indicate that the program is needed and timely but some areas of weakness do exist. The following implications and recommendations can be made based on the results of the preliminary evaluation.

1. Training of agents has improved but there are still weaknesses in

the training and materials that should be addressed. RE:FIT is a unique program in that the program is a process that has many potential products or ends. Each participant could potentially have a different ending place and set of outcomes. This implies that agents need different skills for implementation of this type of program than they have previously needed for other Extension programs. This fact makes the training of the implementors of RE:FIT extremely important. The training has been evaluated in depth to provide formative information to continually improve the training process. This evaluative effort should continue.

2. The initial data collected provide a good baseline description of participants in the program. It appears from these data, that the participants in the program to date are similar to the population for which the program was designed. In other words, findings from preliminary discussions were not surprising and indicate that the program is on target in terms of recipients. The recommendation would be to continue to market the program in a manner simnilar to which it has been marketed. We appear to be reaching our target audience.

3. Results show that participants in the program are improving through their initial participation. Certainly, the program is in the beginning phases and should be monitored throughout implementation. Using data from implementors and clients strengthens the validity of the information. The suggestion would be to continue to

monitor the progress of the program and to follow-up with "graduated" clients in six months to a year to determine a more complete impact of participation.

4. The program has been in an introductory stage of initiation. Many changes have been made in every major portion of the program. The resource materials have been revised, training has improved, marketing has increased, and still the program is in a state of initial implementation. One can only again highlight the extreme importance of a continual process of evaluation efforts to produce formative information which can increase the probability of the program being a success.

APPENDIX A

FROM FARMING TO ?

Preliminary Discussion

TO THE AGENT: This discussion guide is for your use in assessing where the farm family is in relationship to the RE:FIT program. The first thing you are to do is to have the participants complete the 10 item questionairre. Following this, you will need to lead into the discussion questions in a manner in which you are comfortable. If you utilize any of the modules, please continue the discussion after helping the family members complete the modules. After your session with the family, please keep a copy of the discussion in your files and use the followup forms each time you have a meeting with the participants. After the initial meeting, send a copy of the completed discussion guide to:

The Ohio Cooperative Extension Service
Community & Natural Resource Development
RE:FIT c/o Joe E. Heimlich
2120 Fyffe Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1099

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Tell the participants "some of the questions that follow are personal. They are necessary for me to understand so that we can develop the right plan to reach your goals. If a question is too personal, you can answer 'I don't know'. Thanks for understanding."

STEP ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

NAME/ADDRESS	AGE (est)	SEX	YRS IN FARMING	WORK OFF FARM (WHERE)
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

1. Is your family currently experiencing severe financial difficulties? YES NO DON'T KNOW

2. Would additional non-farm income aid the family in getting through any financial stress? YES NO DON'T KNOW

3. Could your family's combined non-farm income sustain the the family if:
   A. they remain in farming? YES NO DON'T KNOW
   B. there were no farm debt YES NO DON'T KNOW

AGENT: THE NEXT SIX QUESTIONS ARE COMMUNITY SERVICES QUESTIONS. THEY SHOULD GIVE YOU A FEEL FOR THE EMOTIONAL/SUSTAINANCE NEEDS OF THE FAMILY.

4. Do you believe that your situation is affecting the way you live day to day? YES NO DON'T KNOW

5. Is the farm stress causing any other problems in your lives such as being argumentative or short tempered? YES NO DON'T KNOW

6. Does your family openly share all the news, good and bad, about the farm operation? YES NO DON'T KNOW

7. Are there friends with whom your family discusses
   A. your financial situation? YES NO DON'T KNOW

   B. your emotional situation? YES NO DON'T KNOW

8. Has a member of your family talked with your pastor or rabbi about your situation? YES NO DON'T KNOW

9. Would you say your financial situation is: (CIRCLE ONE)

   Very Good: You live better than you have ever lived

   Good: You live the way you usually do

   Not Good: You will get by, but it will be tough

   Bad: You cannot aford the extras you used to have

   Desperate: You cannot afford basic items now

AGENT: THE NEXT 5 QUESTIONS DEAL WITH TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS. DEPENDING UPON THE ANSWERS, IT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE TO USE THE **Discovery Module** WHEN INDICATED.

10. If you were to quit farming, what kind of job would you get?_____
_____
_____

11. Regarding skills you have that employers might want, do you believe you have: (CIRCLE ONE FOR EACH PERSON)

    A. Alot of skills
    B. Some skills
    C. A few skills
    D. Not many skills

12. Could you name some of these skills?_____
_____
_____

13. If you were in a job interview, what words would you use to describe yourself? (record any adjectives used such as "proud", "hardworking", "trustworthy") _____

_____

_____

AGENT: WHEN APPROPRIATE, USE THE **Discovery Module** HERE.

14. Are the skills you have enough to get you another job? YES NO DON'T KNOW

15. Can you do about anything with the skills you have from farming? YES NO DON'T KNOW

16. Can you think of any employers locally who might need the skills you have? YES NO DON'T KNOW

17. (If yes) Can you name them?_____

_____

_____

18. Would you want to do that kind of work? YES NO DON'T KNOW

AGENT: IF THEY ANSWER POSITIVELY TO QUESTIONS 16, 17 AND 18, YOU MIGHT WISH TO PROCEED TO THE **Placement Referral** SECTION OF THE HANDBOOK.

19. Do you have certain requirements in your mind of what you would like in a new job? YES NO DON'T KNOW

20. Do these jobs relate to your transferrable skills? YES NO DON'T KNOW

AGENT: DEPENDING UPON ANSWERS, THIS IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO USE THE **Interest Module.**

THE NEXT THREE QUESTIONS DEAL WITH JOB SEARCH SKILLS.

21. Have you ever prepared a resume? YES NO DON'T KNOW

22. Have you ever prepared a "functional resume"? YES NO DON'T KNOW

A functional resume is one that includes life skills and experiences, not just work history and educational background.

23. If you were to go for a job interview, do you know what to expect? YES NO DON'T KNOW

24. If you were to go for a job interview, do you know how to prepare? YES NO DON'T KNOW

AGENT: THE NEXT SEVEN QUESTIONS DEAL WITH JOB PLACEMENT AND NETWORKING.

25.	Knowing you have skills that are transferrable from farming to other occupations, do you know what kinds of jobs use these skills?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
26.	Do you know where you could go to find out?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
27.	Do you know any people (positions) who could help you identify potential jobs using these skills?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
28.	Name any one job you might like to do. _____			
29.	Do you know what tasks this job requires? (Tasks are a series of steps using specific skills to accomplish a specified outcome)	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
30.	If yes, do you have some of these skills?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
31.	If yes, do you know how to let a potential employer know you have those skills?	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW

IF NEEDED, REFER TO THE "JOB SKILLS" SECTION IN THE HANDBOOK.

AGENT: THIS IS THE END OF THE DATA COLLECTION FROM THE FARM FAMILY. PLEASE COMPLETE THE REST OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AFTER THE SESSION.

	Prior to this program:	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	The family was aware of their many skills from farming that are transferrable to other occupations.	5	4	3	2	1
2.	The family had defined their interests that could be applied to their job search.	5	4	3	2	1
3.	The family did not know of the job opportunities available to them.	5	4	3	2	1
4.	The family had not thought much about outside employment for income.	5	4	3	2	1
5.	The family was able to identify occupations in which they would like to work.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	The family was able to identify occupations for which they were qualified.	5	4	3	2	1

After this session:

7.	The family is aware of their many skills from farming that are transferrable to other occupations.	5	4	3	2	1
8.	The family has defined their interests that can be applied to their job search.	5	4	3	2	1
9.	The family knows of some job opportunities available to them.	5	4	3	2	1
10.	The family has not thought much about outside employment for income.	5	4	3	2	1
11.	The family members are able to identify occupations in which they would like to work.	5	4	3	2	1
12.	The family is able to identify occupations for which they are qualified.	5	4	3	2	1
13.	The structure of RE:FIT is effective in working through the discovery process with the farm families.	5	4	3	2	1
14.	The Modules were an effective means of letting the clients learn about transferrable skills.	5	4	3	2	1
15.	The **Modules** were an effective means of letting the clients learn about their interests.	5	4	3	2	1
16.	The **Modules** were an effective means of sharing job information with the clients.	5	4	3	2	1
17.	The handbook is easy to use for referral information.	5	4	3	2	1

18. Changes I would make in the RE:FIT program are:

_____

_____

The Ohio Cooperative Extension Service
The Ohio State University
RE:FIT JEH

APPENDIX B

RE:FIT LOG SHEET

Please complete a log sheet for every visit/consultation with persons who have been through the RE:FIT initial discussion. These are for your reference and are to be kept in your files. When you believe a person to be no longer involved in RE:FIT- due to successful referral, lack of interest, or job placement- please send a copy of the completed logs to :

Ohio Cooperative Extension Service
Community & Natural Resource Development
RE:FIT c/o Joe E. Heimlich
2120 Fyffe Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1099

DATE _____ TIME _____

Name of Person _____

THIS PERSON HAS BEEN THROUGH:

Preliminary Discussion _____ **Discovery Module** _____

Interest Module _____ **Guidance Module** _____

Have the person's goals changed since the last time you met?

_____
_____
_____

What was the purpose of this meeting?

_____
_____
_____

What did you recommend? Where did you refer them?

_____
_____
_____

Do you expect a follow up session? If so, when?

_____
_____

APPENDIX C

Ohio State

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

Date: 22-Jul-1986 04:23p EDT
From: Thomas M Archer
SHEL
Dept: OCES Southwest
Tel No: (513) 498 - 7239

TO: Joe E Heimlich (HEIMLICH)
TO: Miami County Coop. Extension (MIAM)
TO: Emmalou VanTilburg (VANTILBURG)

Subject: Focus Group Interview

RE:FIT

QUESTIONING ROUTE - FOCUSED GROUP INTERVIEW

BY THOMAS ARCHER

7/22/86

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM

(1) - How well was RE:FIT implemented?
(2) - Describe the timeliness and utility of the Agent Training in RE:FIT
(3) - How well was the recommended contact with clientele structured??
(4) - What types of materials supported the Agent's efforts?

(Utility of Forms)

a. What was the biggest problem in using the forms?
b. What was the best feature of the Forms?
c. Which questions were asked that did not need to be asked?
d. What are items that should be included but were not?
e. Explain in what ways the form contributed to the process?
f. How comfortable did you feel completing the forms?
g. Was the information gained useful?

(5) - What could have been improved so that more/better contacts could have been established with targeted clients?

REACTIONS OF AGENTS TOWARD PROCESS

(1) - Describe how well the orientation with the RE:FIT program materials met your needs.
- Were there problems with learning the mechanics of RE:FIT? Describe.
(2) - Describe the typical contacts with a client in the RE:FIT program.
- Are the benefits, or potential benefits, of RE:FIT worth the costs?

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